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# Postscript

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## Postscript

For quite a few years now, since the mid-eighties in fact, we have listed our contents without respect to the genres by which they were submitted, normally stories, essays, and poems. Sometimes we have separated reviews from the rest, but not always; for it has seemed to us fairer, and also more interesting, to leave it to the reader to decide what she was reading or how he chooses to read what we offer. Poems have not been thoroughly integrated into this format but for another reason that we simply have not pressed ourselves to resolve. Whereas no separate status is given poems in our table of contents, you will find them inside our pages under the general heading of Two, Three, or Four Poems and the writer's name rather than just by title and author. We are not entirely satisfied with this procedure, which stems from our often accepting more than one poem at a time whereas we usually take just one story or essay, and from our then not wanting to place the poet's name in 18 point italic bold on three or four consecutive pages while the prose writer's name appears but once. Indeed, on those rare occasions when we have taken a small set of stories or essays by a single writer we have set them up as we do poems—Five Stories · *Norman Sage*, for example—as appeared in a recent issue. And when we run a single poem by a poet, we present it on the page as we do the work of any other writer.

Obviously these practices have something to do with the currents of our time in which all generic distinctions are blurred and the category of the literary is invalid, in the minds of some, problematic in that of others, or at the very least on a continuum that blends with all other writing. Then, even though our format makes more than a nod to these ideas, we undercut ourselves later by offering annual indexes in which we list everything by the traditional genres according to how we either know or assume different works were presented to us. In part this last practice is for the sake of libraries, for readers who may wish to scan for certain kinds of things, for compilers of specialized bibliographies, and for editors who review us for various Best American Annuals and other such collections. Nevertheless we would want to agree overall that the various writings we offer are at least as much what readers find them to be as what their writers wish to call them. You will not be surprised to hear that often when we are considering individual items we find ourselves saying to each other, "Poem, huh, it

reads like an essay to me”; or, “Why isn’t this essay a story?” Once in a while, also, we include texts of some other category entirely, simply because we have stumbled upon one and found it fascinating.

Given our willingness to relax the boundaries of the literary, which is but a reflection of our times, and the concomitant industry all around us that blends literature with culture and offers more and more noncanonical texts for literary consideration, it is a surprise to me that we have never once received, among the several hundred items that arrive each week, a single batch of pioneer letters, or entries from a diary of more than private interest, or text of multiple authorship by a group guided by some sense of urgency, or, well, one could go on, but who am I to spell out the parameters of what ought to seize our attention? I assume they would be offered with SASE like everything else and with the understanding that we must return, for reasons of size alone, far more work than we can ever bring to print. Still you would think that someone would have sent something like this by now if only to see whether we might be vexed.

I suppose that one of the difficulties is that these texts seldom constitute alone the new view of the literary. More often it is that text, or at least ample reference to and quotation from that text, brought within the commentary of the person who locates it; and it is the narrative of that discovery and the display of what the discoverer then thinks of it that makes for the new story. Well, no matter; we are all interested in a good story; we all know that stories take a multitude of forms; and who are we to dictate *a priori* its sources or design? We are here to make choices from what is offered and to put together a mix of things, three times a year, that seems to deserve wider attention than our own, to deserve, not just reading, but rereading. Length is not an absolute though it is always a practical consideration. We have yet to offer an issue as a monograph, and I suppose the chances of that are miniscule. Essays or stories of 40–50 pages have not been rare, however; and serialization is thinkable. Our single rule of thumb has always been that the longer it is the more we have to love it. That seems fair enough.

In any case, I mention all this because it has been on my mind for a long time, and if I am able to urge action upon any of you, why, so much the better.

—D.H.